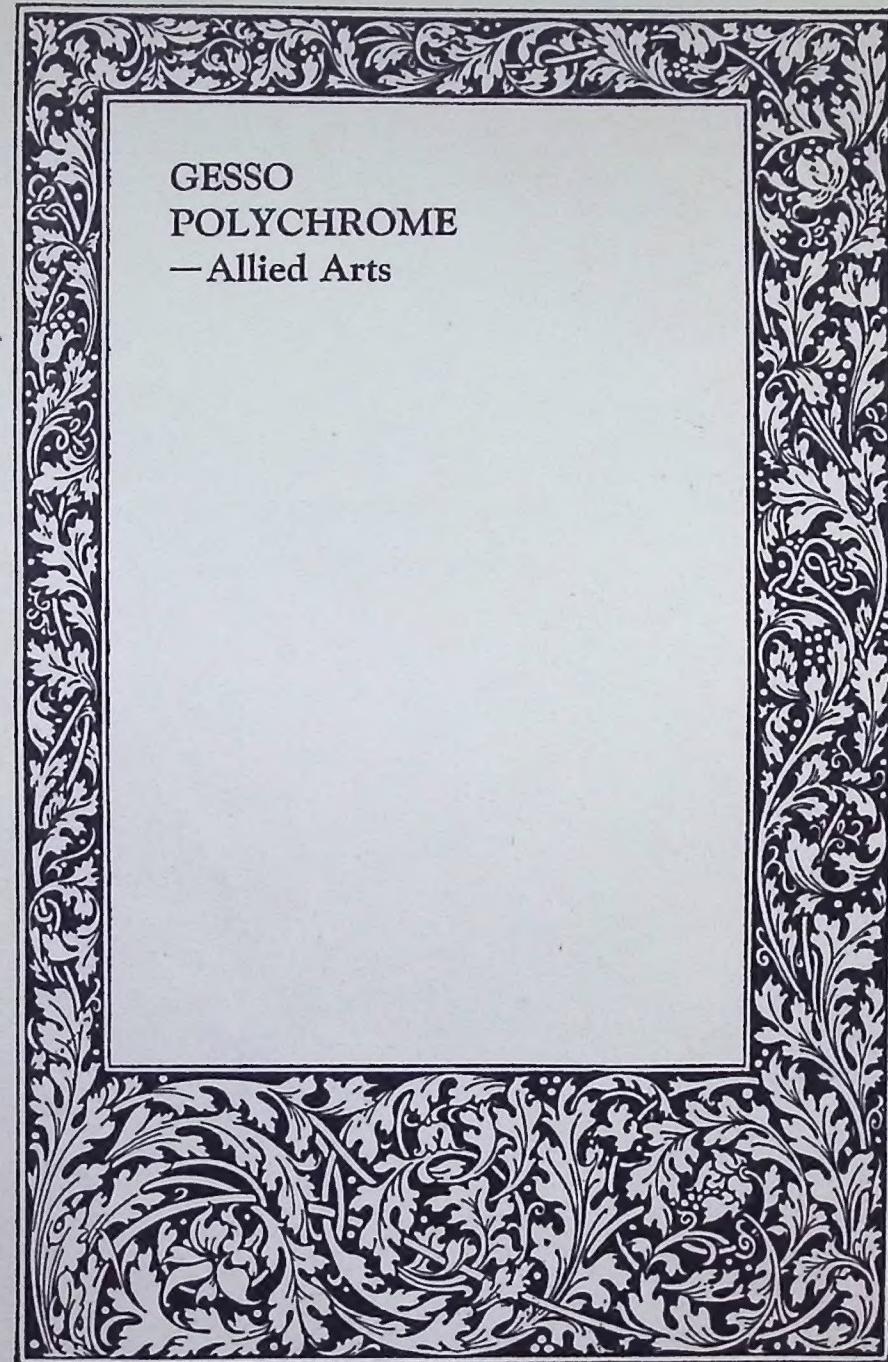
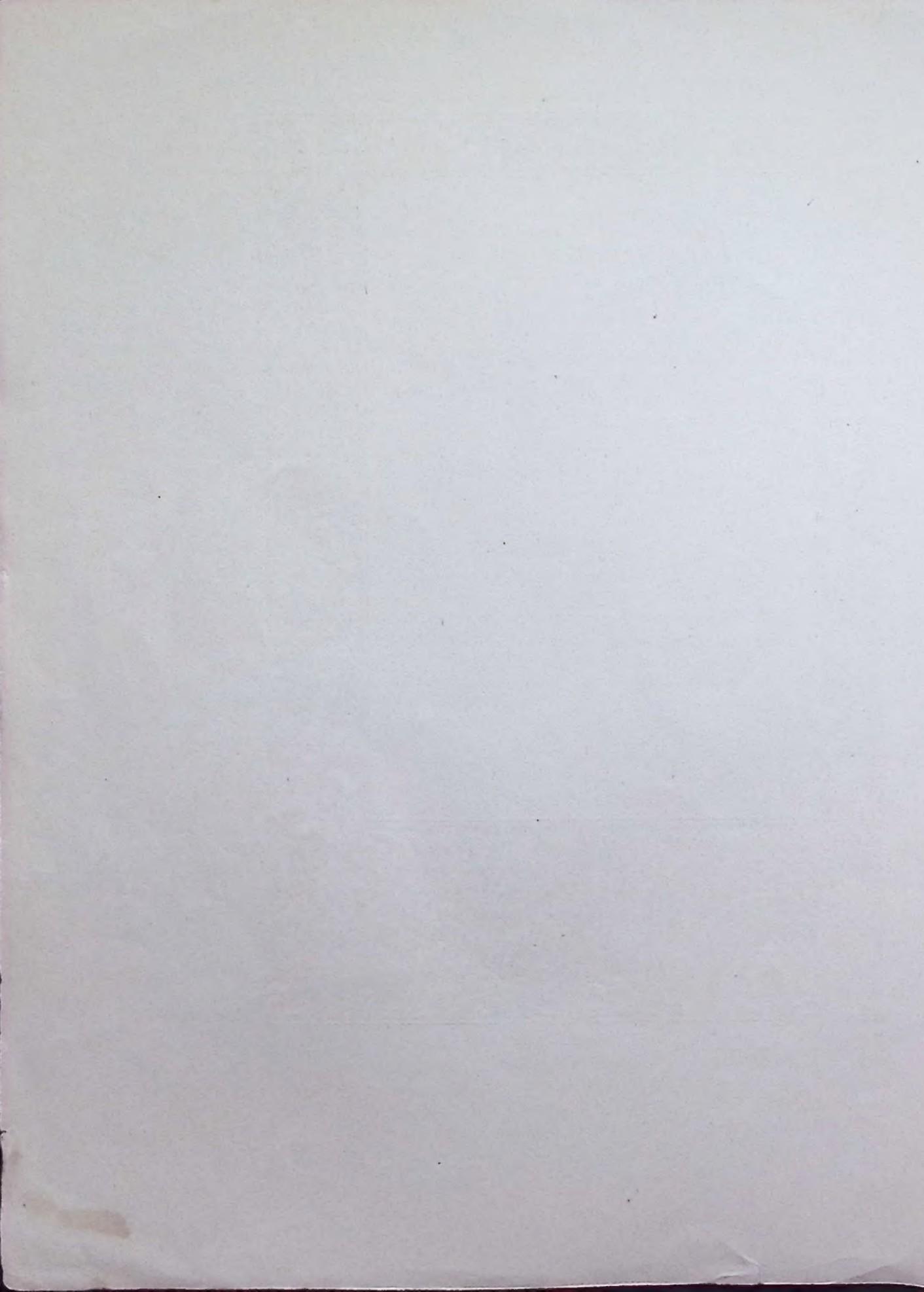


**GESSO
POLYCHROME**
—Allied Arts



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LESSON TWENTY-NINE



Forsaking the grey mists of winter which, like the veil over a picture of the imagination, wrap the streets of any great city in sombre mystery, we seek the cheerful and inviting lights of the novelty shop—the little shop at which, and so frequently these days, one finds the chic woman procuring the proper gifts for the birthday or card party, or for some other festive occasion through which she is to show her taste and discrimination, as well as her generosity by bestowing presents upon fortunate recipients. Among so many beautiful things to be viewed the object that is novel and exquisite of design attracts her attention and excites her curiosity.

As there are attractive articles on display in every shop that carries gifts and novelties, the thinking manager of today realizes that to coax trade

to his shop, he must constantly exhibit in his windows a never ending variety of articles that, due to their freshness and originality as well as their beauty, will arrest the attention of the casual passer-by. In this alertness and adoption of "the very latest" lies his success.

Among the newest creations and one that promises great returns for effort expended is the recently developed art of Gesso, or the decoration of articles in low relief. Candlesticks, frames, lamps, and parchment shades are a few of the articles being shown in Gesso, but any object of wood, cardboard, glass, or metal lends itself to this distinctive and fascinating method of decorating. It is becoming steadily and surely one of the most popular of arts for the buyer as well as a very lucrative one for the dealer.

GESSO—A NOVEL ART

I have seen cheap tawdry little frames bought at a variety store that were made beautiful with a gesso design polychromed. Some of these looked like genuine antiques. Book racks, book ends, humidors, old mirrors, lamp shades—in fact, any plain inexpensive article lends itself to this type of decoration.

What is Gesso? It is a substance grey in color that reminds one very much of putty. It is rather thick and will harden so rapidly under the action of the air that it will in a few hours of exposure become as hard as stone. As of all good things, there are many imitations on the market—some fairly good; others very poor. It has been my privilege to make tests of various

formulas in general use. Many of these fell below my expectations. Some were too brittle, while others were easily crushed and would turn to powder. None had elasticity enough to stand a reasonable tension and would, therefore crack. I found several kinds of gesso made from these formulas that were already on the market and selling at high prices. I bought some samples and by adding other ingredients gave them what they lacked—elasticity. I might mention that I have given my different trials a thorough test and I find that my efforts were rewarded. I have produced a Gesso that is a combination of all the good points I found in others plus the element of elasticity which is so necessary to Gesso that is to be used on pliable materials.

APPLYING THE GESSO

First melt Gesso by placing it (in the can it came in) in a pan of water. Heat this until it reaches the boiling point. Although this method is rather slow, it will pay you in the end. When Gesso has been brought to the consistency of cream, stir it thoroughly until all the lumps have disappeared. If it is too thick, add a small amount of hot water. This will be found

necessary especially if the job requires a long time to execute, for water evaporates very rapidly. The substance is now ready for application.

If the Gesso is to be applied to a flat wooden article, such as a frame or a panel, give the surface one coat of thin shellac on both sides, using a medium sized brush. Do not substitute var-

nish for shellac, and do not apply Gesso to an oiled surface. Be sure that your coat of shellac is a thin one. If that substance has thickened you may thin it with a few drops of alcohol. Then put the article aside to dry—an hour or so will do. (This will prevent warping.) You will then trace the design you have selected, using carbon paper or a pricked pattern as described in a former lesson.

With a small camel's hair brush, apply the Gesso boldly within the outlines. Fill in completely each individual motif composing the entire design. The Gesso must be thin enough to flow readily. It should be applied rather heavily. The motifs should be not less than one-sixteenth of an inch thick.

Do not be nervous about this work for if you make an error the Gesso may be scraped off and all traces of it easily removed by sandpapering. If you don't get on enough, you can add more; if you get on too much, you can sandpaper it down. If bubbles appear, just prick them with a pin. If you don't use all the Gesso you have melted, put away the surplus and next time just melt it again, for its efficacy will not have been impaired at all. If more Gesso is to be added to one spot to get a deeper relief, it should be done before the first application is entirely dry

to enable the second one to be smooth and even in distribution. You will find it necessary to clean your brushes frequently in hot water, otherwise they will get thick and unwieldy. Although no highly specialized skill is required to apply Gesso, patience and neatness are necessary. With these qualities in his possession, even the beginner can meet with the greatest success.

When the Gesso is applied and little touches have been added for stronger relief, the article should be laid aside until thoroughly dry—it may take ten or twelve hours. Then, we will proceed with enameling, or polychroming, both operations to be explained later in the course of this lesson.

In Plate 1, I have designed a simple motif to fill in a circular space to be executed for practice in Gesso. I want you to trace this design to the practice board and treat it according to the instructions I have given you above.

In Plate 2, I have made a design for a frame. This, too, I want you to execute in Gesso.

Before submitting these plates, however, they must be either polychromed or enameled as described below.

STIPPLING THE GESSO

Often the background of an article is covered with a thin coating of Gesso, which is patted either with a wadded up cloth or a piece of paper or a brush in order to give it a mottled

effect. This is known as stippling, and is generally employed for the background of surfaces on which a Gesso design is applied.

"Make the most of yourself for that is all there is of you."—Emerson.

COLORING THE GESSO

There are two effective ways to finish Gesso. These are polychroming and enameling. Polychroming gives delightfully soft blended tones which are yet rich and colorful. It is used most effectively where an antique or oriental touch is sought. Enameling on the other hand is used where a distinct color scheme, rather than a blended harmony, is desired. If one wishes to

match exactly the various colors used in a decorative scheme, enameling will be found the more suitable process. If, for instance, a lamp has a shade of crepe de chine which has been batiked in tan, amber, and a delicate burnt sienna, no better standard could be found for it than one in which these colors were repeated by the use of enamel over Gesso.

POLYCHROMING

Polychroming is one of the newest of ancient arts. Apparently a contradiction, this is in reality true for no art of present day invention is enjoying greater vogue than is polychroming which is a revival of an ancient Egyptian process. The word itself comes from two Greek words, *polys*, meaning "many," and *chroma*, meaning "color."

Its Byzantine ancestry is evident today in the many polychromed replicas of antiques seen on the market. And even in objects which are not reproductions, an attempt is made to give a soft, mellow finish that suggests age.

The process, which is described below, is simple and within the province of any amateur.

To polychrome an article which has been modeled in Gesso, first give the entire surface of the article a thin coat of varnish. Allow this to partially dry and then dust over the whole surface a bronze or silver powder. Brush this carefully into all cracks and crevices. After this primary coat of powder has been allowed a few hours for drying, once more go over the edges of the design and into the cracks and depressions with thin varnish or sizing. When this has reached a sticky consistency (it will take from fifteen to thirty minutes) shake a powder of old blue or of some other rich color over the whole

article and then dust off the surface. The article must next be thoroughly brushed—an old toothbrush will do. This brushing process enhances very greatly the beauty of the design for it blends the tones and gives depth to the relief. Touches of oil colors or enamels here and there for high lights will enliven the coloring. In a few hours the article will be completely dry and may be handled without injury to its finish, and the mysterious process of polychroming is finished.

Another simple and effective way of polychroming, and *one that I myself like to use*, is this. I mix the metallic powder—gold or silver generally—with either bronzing liquid or banana oil and apply it to the entire surface. After it has dried if I wish to dull the gold I rub brown oil paint thinned with turpentine over it. This may be allowed to collect in the crevices but should be wiped from the high spots with a cloth slightly dampened with turpentine.

This same method may be used with various colors, e. g., an article may be given a coat of silver (silver powder mixed with bronzing liquid), and after that has dried, green oil paint or blue oil paint thinned with turpentine may be rubbed over the surface. This should be allowed to settle in the depressions, but should be wiped from the high spots.

ENAMELING

To those already experienced in enameling, the retouching of Gesso by that method offers no new difficulties. Let us take an illustration. Suppose we wish to decorate a lamp standard for a room in which green, blue, and orange predominate. We will select a design in which these three colors may be pleasingly and appropriately introduced—a conventional motif of roses and leaves for example. The first thing to do is to cover the entire surface with a coat of dark blue enamel. After that has dried thoroughly, the flowers should be colored with orange enamel and the leaves with green. Care must be taken not to smear any of these

colors on the background for neatness here as everywhere is absolutely an essential quality. Too much stress cannot be placed upon this.

However, in an attempt to be neat, one must be careful not to detract from the very characteristic that distinguishes Gesso from other types of ornamentation and gives it its peculiar charm—namely, its irregularity. Here it is necessary to acquire "Studied Negligence." Your work must be irregular but not untidy, so do not attempt to give clearly defined outlines and clean cut edges to all the forms of a design as that would detract from the quality that characterizes Gesso work.

When the enamel has dried, which will be shortly, the article is ready for use.

This method of retouching Gesso not only gives a surprisingly smart appearance, but also a very durable finish for the enamel hardening in conjunction with the Gesso proves very lasting.

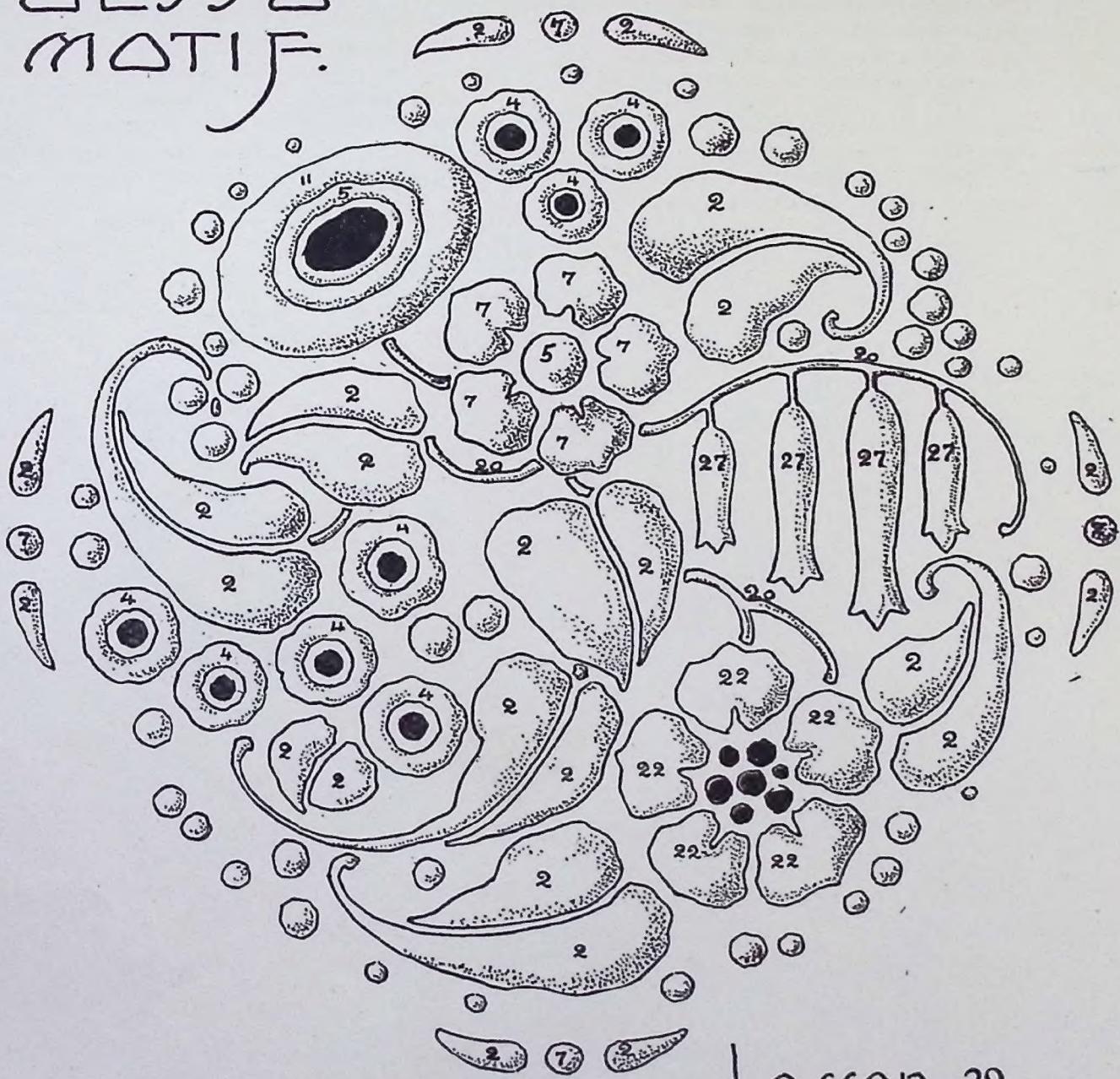
You are now prepared to color the plates which have been treated with Gesso. Although you may either polychrome or enamel them, as a finishing process, I believe you will feel better

satisfied if you try both methods. You will then be in a position to determine nicely which process to use in the future, and having a first hand knowledge, you will be able to speak with greater authority to your customers. So submit Plate 1 Gessoed and enameled, and Plate 2 Gessoed and polychromed. A Gesso design is much more effective when the Gesso is put on heavily than when it isn't. Your designs should be from one-sixteenth to one-eighth of an inch in depth. Gessoed designs are never outlined.

Gabriel Andre Petit



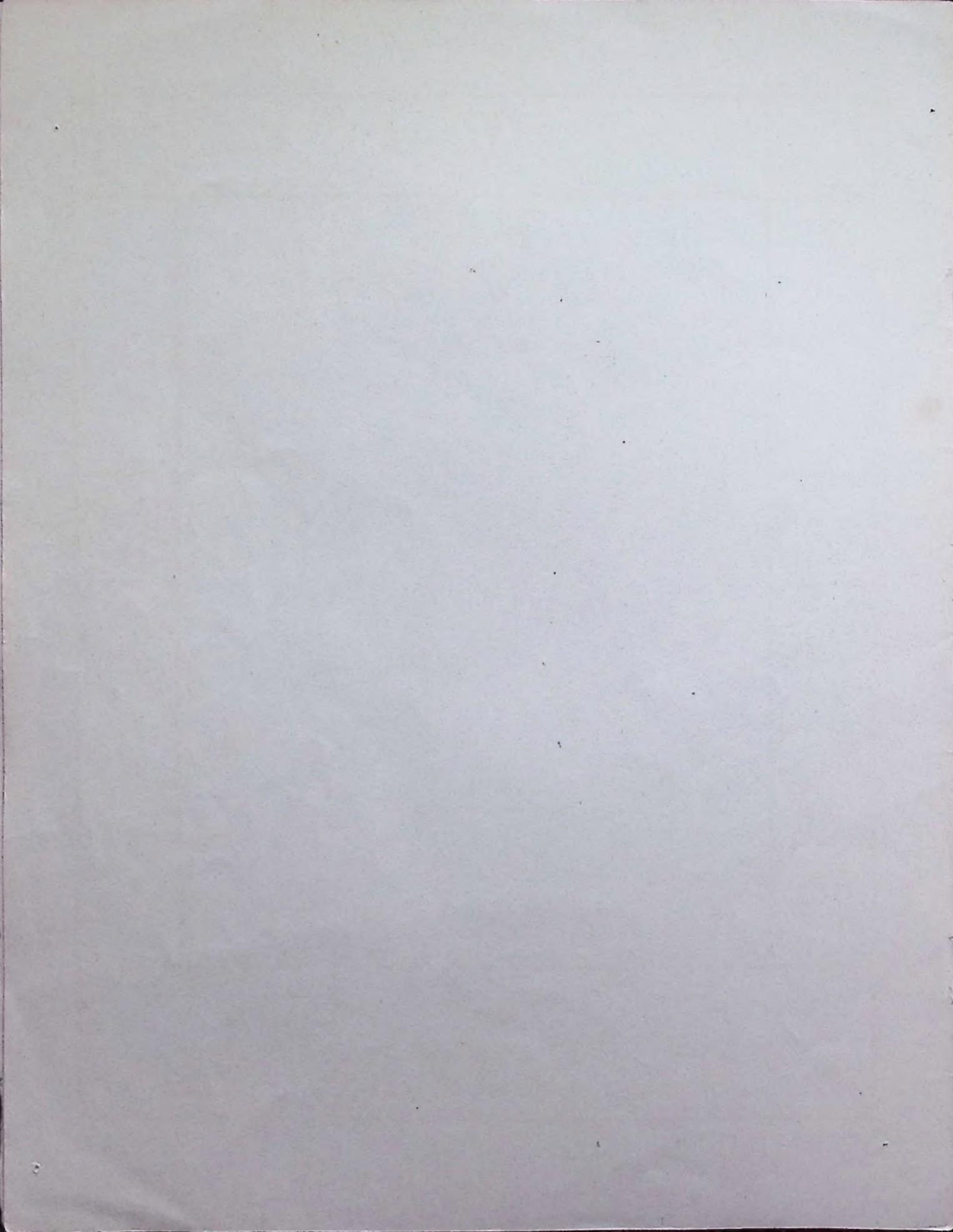
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Lesson 29
Plate 1

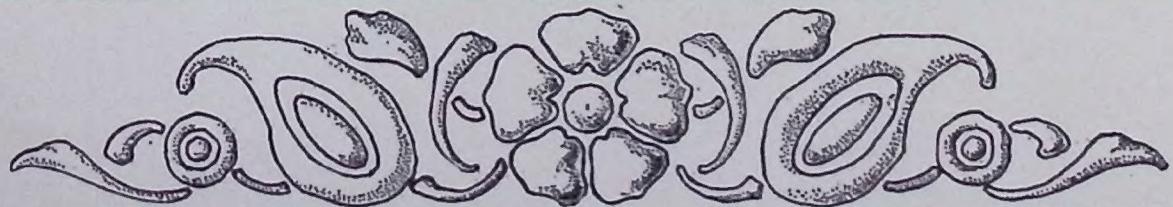
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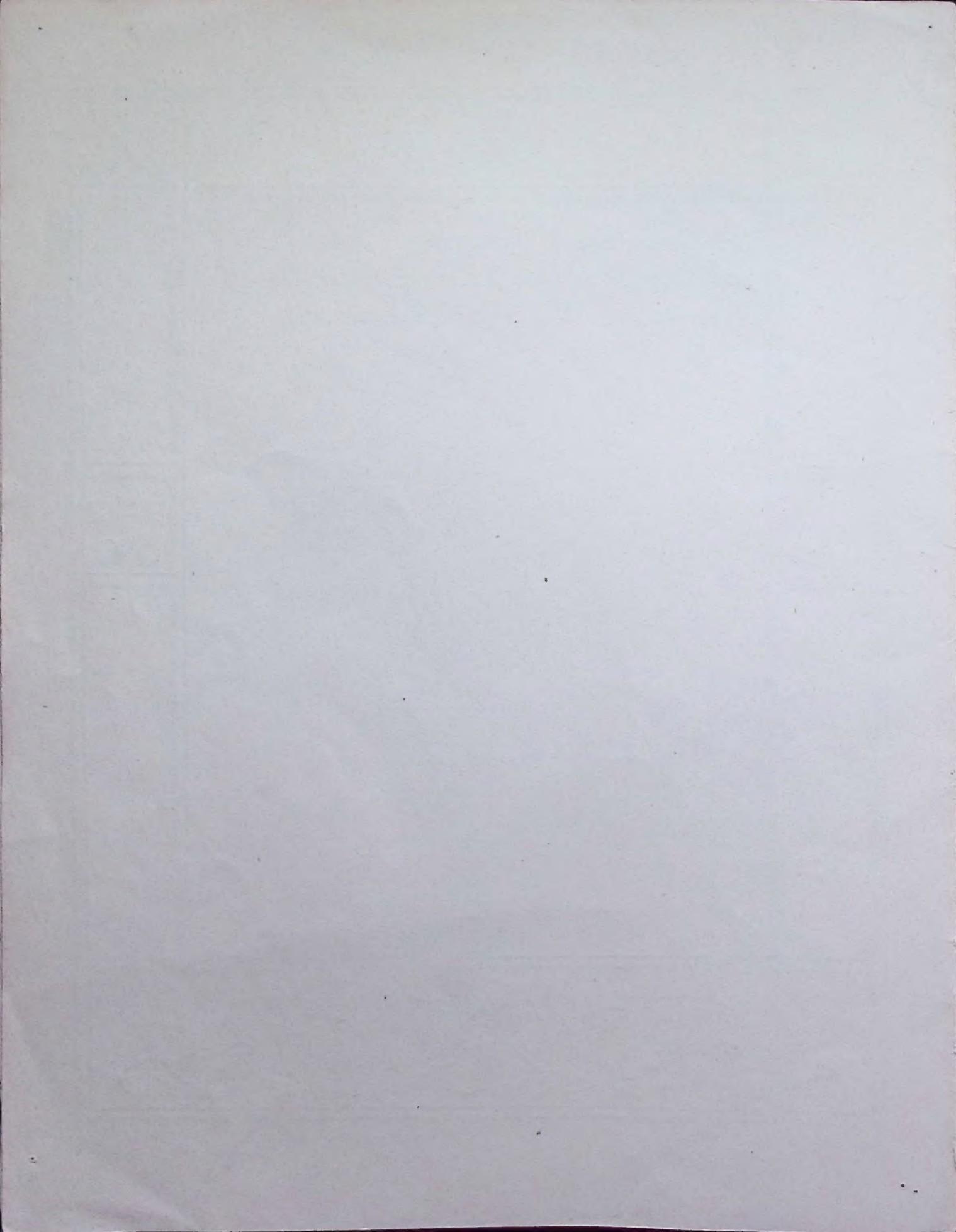


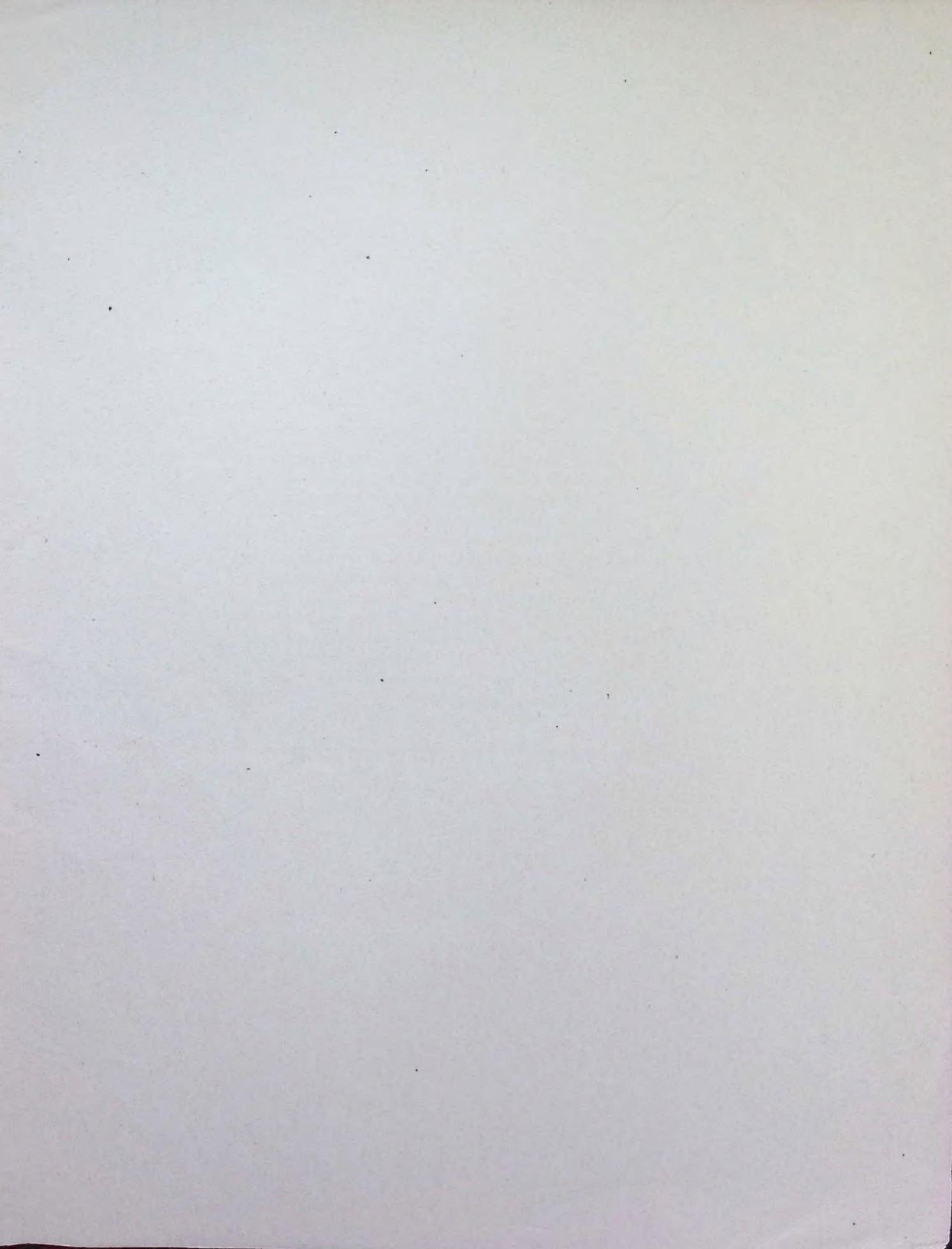


A Gessoed Frame
of the Italian Renaissance
period. Blue on silver.

Lesson 29
Plate 2 ©









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"Many members begin decorating giftwares and objets d'art after finishing only a few lessons. Others prefer to finish more lessons and more subjects in order to decorate giftwares in a greater variety and in a more salable manner. In any case you should finish at least six or more lessons before requesting the lessons which have to do with merchandising and how to make money. These lessons will be sent to you automatically when you have finished the tenth lesson on the subject of Enameling Furniture. The lessons on merchandising or how to make money are numbered as follows: 3, 6, 8, 11, 14, 20, 23, 26, and 28."